2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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881 751 The first act of the ritual, the giving of the *undumila*[1] medicine to the girl, is a symbol of sexual intercourse, and it is thought to be a prophylactic against pain in intercourse, frequent or painful periods, and injury from contact with those who are 'heavy'. 'It is given so that her belly may not be painful,' said Mwaisumo's mother, an elderly woman. Kaitile's wife explained: 'The pungent root is the penis of the husband, the cup is her vagina, the salt, also pungent, is the semen of her husband. Biting the root and eating the salt is copulation.' Mwakiconde's wife gave a similar interpretation:

884 751 The *undumila* is put through the leaf of a bark-cloth tree, shaped into a cup, and it is a sign of man and woman, the penis in the vagina. It is similar to the plantains which we give her when we wash her. The plantains are a symbol of the husband. If we do not give her the *ekipili* medicine the blood never dries up, and it is the same with the *undumila*. If it is not given she constantly has periods and is barren. Yes, some have a period twice in one month—those who have rotted. Only a few are like this, not many. . . . The *undumila* is given to the girl at once, in the month as soon as she grows up, so that she can go about without fear; otherwise, if she washes without having had it, then a heavy one may walk over her footprints, that is overstep her, and she will not bear a child, she menstruates continually.

Kaitile's wife said much the same: 'If the heavy ones have overstepped her, her body rots. The man is not sterile, but the woman is; the man's semen is fertile, but the woman has painful periods. It is the pain of periods we symbolize in the sharpness of the *undumila* and salt.'

827 834 The heavy ones (*abasite*), feared both during the puberty ritual and by a mother with a new-born child, are those who sleep with their husbands. They include women both before and after conception. 'When the pregnancy is advanced and the husband has left off sleeping with his wife, then she is not heavy and she can keep a mother with a new-born baby company and hold the baby. A man who is sleeping with a woman is also heavy. They say: "He will overstep us."' This was the statement of Mwakiconde's wife and Kaitile, questioned separately, confirmed every point. We then asked Kaitile: 'How is the heaviness (*ubusite*) from lying with a man dangerous to those going through puberty and childbirth?'

Kaitile: 'Because those who are with their husbands are heavy, they are strong, their fellow the bride (*amasuga*) is empty, light in

[1] *Undumila* is derived from *ukudumila*: to bite, to be painful.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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front. See, the man ejects semen! Does it not go inside? The woman becomes heavy and oversteps the bride.'

Even after she has been treated, the bride avoids any close contact with those who are 'heavy'; in particular they are excluded from her hut. Her own mother 'does not sleep with the father at all from the time the girl grows up until she goes to her husband, and begins intercourse with him. It is taboo. She says to her husband: "See, I am keeping my child company." ' But the 'play' of her companions does not matter, for intercourse *inter crura* does not make anyone heavy; it is the semen of a man in a woman's belly which makes her heavy, and her husband also, through contact with her.

The second medicine used at the puberty ritual is the *ikipiki*,[1] made from the bark of certain small-leafed forest trees. The same species is used by many Nyakyusa families, but the identity of the person who provides it is very important, for it is identified with the blood (*ililopa*) of the family. In the puberty-marriage ritual the groom's mother provides the *ikipiki* with which the bride washes at her husband's (if she is a senior wife), at the rite of 'putting her in' (*ukwingesia*), at the second washing with her husband, at the shaving, and at the washing before jumping over fire. The same medicine is used each time. It is also sprinkled on the bananas she eats at the *ukwingesia*. The bride's own mother, however, provides the *ikipiki* which is added to her porridge and buried under the hearth the day she first menstruates, and that used for washing her father, or brother, and mother at the *ukwingesia*. Also, should it be known that the bride is not a virgin, the mother-in-law will refuse to bring her *ikipiki* and it must be provided for each rite by her mother. The medicine is in itself awesome (*asiya*). Kasitile's wife remarked one day that the bride slept with one of her maids in front of her, 'at her stomach', and one behind. We asked why. She replied: 'That *ikipiki* medicine! It's awesome. She fears to be alone.' 'If someone has not given her the *ikipiki* to drink and heavy ones cook food and give it to her she goes bad, she has periods without cessation.' 'The mother gives porridge with *ikipiki* to the girl and buries some under the hearth. That means she may be heavy in her stomach, for if heavy ones warm themselves at the fire in the house, she is in danger of going bad, she will have a continuous issue of blood.' 'If the *ikipiki* were not given, her period

[1] *Un-piki*: a tree of any species. *Bi-piki*: medicine made from the bark of certain species (one is a Mimosacea) and used in the rituals of death, puberty, and birth.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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spread and the foods and altars traditional in them continue to be used: thus Nyakyusa Christians use wheaten bread and wine from the grape, whereas their pagan neighbours use bananas and millet beer, and their altar is a table set at the east end of a consecrated building, not the earth of a banana grove.

Nyakyusa ideas of physiology are those of a strongly patrilineal society, in marked contrast with those of the Bemba who are matrilineal:[1] to the Nyakyusa a woman is a 'bag' which the husband fills with his 'blood' and so creates a child, while the Bemba believe that 'blood' is passed through the woman, not the man. The taboos of pregnancy also have a patrilineal slant. A difficult labour is commonly attributed, among the Nyakyusa, to the wife's adultery, never to that of her husband, as among the Bemba.

Differences in ritual vary in general form with the differences in economy and structure, but there remains a relative autonomy between them. Not only do symbols spread beyond the economy within which they were coined but, as we showed earlier, poetic licence exists, and the particular associations made by priest and poet are not predictable. Ritual idioms are linked to language, but how closely we do not know. What evidence there is from Bantu Africa suggests a similarity in symbols over a wide area, connected with the similarity in language, but such a hypothesis has yet to be established.

Secondly, the expression of sentiments reaffirms them. Treating food, and reproduction, and family relationships, and the community as sacred, expresses the importance of these things to the group concerned, and at the same time breeds respect for them. Treating them as important in ritual makes people feel that they are important. In Whitehead's phrase, 'the object of symbolism is the enhancement of the importance of what is symbolized'.[2] Rituals are also cathartic in that they express and explicitly reject anti-social attitudes, such as anger, terror, and the wish for death.

Thirdly, the general attitudes expressed in Nyakyusa rituals are necessary to the continuance of any society; they are conditions of social living; and the particular attitudes are necessary to the maintenance of the particular Nyakyusa structure.

Every society, if it is to survive, must value fertility in some

[1] A. I. Richards, 'Some types of family structure amongst the Central Bantu' in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, edited by Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, p. 207; 'Mother-right among the Central Bantu' in *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligman*, edited by Evans-Pritchard, Firth, Malinowski, Schapera, p. 276.

[2] A. N. Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927), p. 19.

3: Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
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of hints and tokens of the goodwill or illwill of the unseen powers, and the wise man is he who profits by them where that is possible; where it is not possible, he is the wise man who quietly awaits the event, thankful that at least the misfortune does not take him at unawares, and that, if he cannot ward off the danger, he can meet it with an equanimity impossible to one upon whom the blow falls suddenly. 787

1. Weather lore is strangely absent, perhaps because in the tropics there is a regularity about the weather which renders prognostication as unnecessary as barometers. If, on a rainy evening, the crow caws on a high note, it will be hot the next day, with a cloudless sky; if on a low note the rain will continue. Another token of rain is given when the long-necked, long-legged birds, *mwanikunye*, fly in a line abreast towards the lake. 787 821

2. Of bad news there are countless indications; of good news only a very few hints have come to light. Twitching of the upper eyelid indicates good fortune of some kind undefined; but if the twitching is in the lower lid, death is near, of the person whose eye twitches, or of a friend. 787 827

3. Before the settlement of the country by the Europeans, long journeys were rarely undertaken, and omens on the way were carefully watched for, and as carefully heeded when they were given. Serpents are the most trusted mediums and great significance is attached to their movements. A serpent lying on one side of the path, and slipping into the bush on that side as the travellers approach, indicates a clear 787 825

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
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for an appropriate medicine, and his main function is organizing the observances. 791 793

(d) SYMBOLISM

In the field of medicine imagination runs riot, and associations are unpredictable. The ingredients of most medicines are professional secrets and unknown to the user who takes the concoction on trust from his doctor, and inquires no further. Therefore the study of medicine is not linked to the study of social relationships in the same manner as is the study of ritual, for the symbolism of medicines is individual and free, whereas the symbolism of ritual is common and obligatory. 278 789

Nevertheless, the imagination of doctors works within the general symbolic system, and such knowledge as we have indicates that many of the associations made are similar to those used in ritual. In medicine, as in the rituals of kinship, one type of banana stands for a male, another for a female, a banana sucker represents a kinsman, a sprouting shoot conception. Smithing and coition are felt to be alike, and the molten iron that trickles out of a forge is linked with menstrual blood. Hair stands for growth, and a bald pate a devastated field. A ring, or circumambulation, implies a protecting fence. Pythons, crocodiles, leopards, and lions stand for power and majesty, spears and thorns for attack; vomiting and emptiness for innocence, spitting for forgiveness. There is colour symbolism in medicines (though we know little of it save that the *ihipiki* which stands for the blood of the lineage is red, or reddish brown), and auditory symbolism, the rumble of thunder and the groaning of a bellows being identified. Men mime that which they wish to avoid, as well as that which they desire; like things are antagonistic as well as sympathetic. No doubt a laborious study of prescriptions would reveal further general principles of association, as well as the range of individual imagination, but such a task has yet to be undertaken. [831] [326] [825] [827] [822]